

How to read a vehicle identification number

A car or truck's vehicle identification number is required by federal regulation to contain specific information in code. Break the code and you can verify key facts about the vehicle. The U.S. government standardized the 17-character format for the 1981 model year for cars and light trucks sold in the USA. VINs for commercial-use and heavier-duty vehicles use a slightly different formula.

Sample vehicle identification number (VIN)

1 H G B H 4 1 J X M N 1 0 9 1 3 6

1st character: Where the vehicle was built

- 1, 4, 5 USA
- 2 Canada¹
- 3 Mexico, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica
- 6 Australia
- 9 Brazil
- J Japan
- K South Korea
- L Taiwan
- S United Kingdom
- V France or Yugoslavia
- W Germany
- Y Sweden
- Z Italy

¹ - reserved for future use by other countries

2nd, 3rd characters:
The manufacturer

4th through 8th characters:
Portrait of the vehicle. Identifies brand (Mercury, Dodge, Oldsmobile), body style (sedan, wagon) and engine size and type (liters, cylinders, etc.).

9th character:
Security code that identifies the VIN as being authorized by the manufacturer. It alerts law-enforcement officers if the VIN is not authentic.

10th character:
Model year of the car.

- | | | | |
|---|------|---|------|
| A | 1980 | N | 1992 |
| B | 1981 | P | 1993 |
| C | 1982 | R | 1994 |
| D | 1983 | S | 1995 |
| E | 1984 | T | 1996 |
| F | 1985 | V | 1997 |
| G | 1986 | W | 1998 |
| H | 1987 | X | 1999 |
| J | 1988 | Y | 2000 |
| K | 1989 | 1 | 2001 |
| L | 1990 | 2 | 2002 |
| M | 1991 | | |

Last six characters:
Serial number of the vehicle. Not all car companies start at 000001; practices vary among manufacturers.

11th character:
Tells which plant assembled the vehicle. Each manufacturer uses different codes to identify its plants.

Sources: Society of Automotive Engineers, Code of Federal Regulations

By June Stacey, USA TODAY

Fig. 1

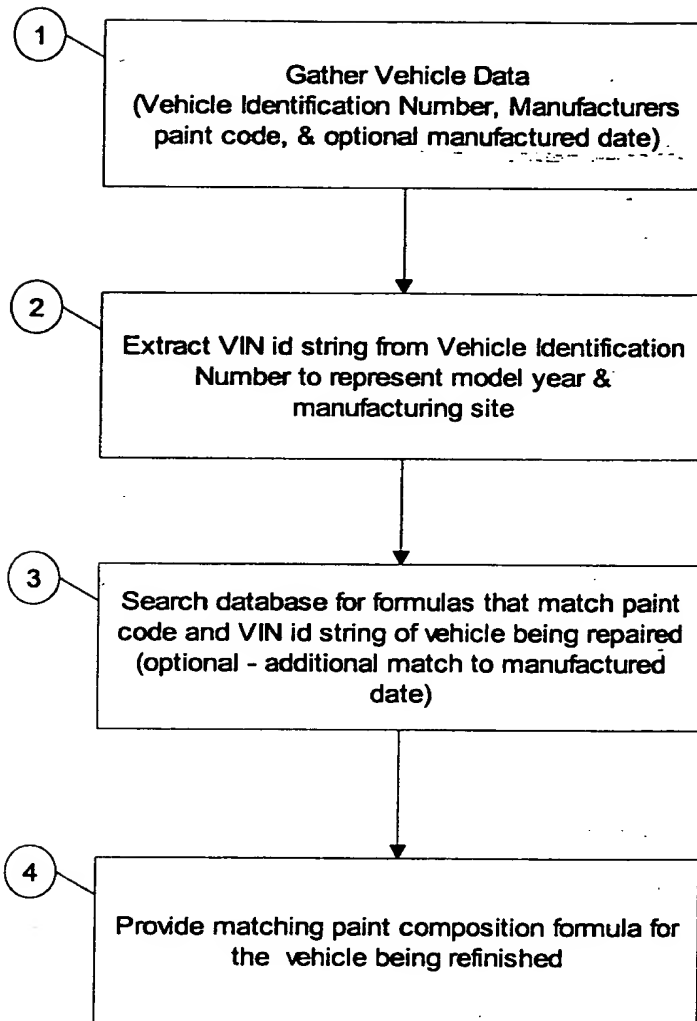


Fig. 2

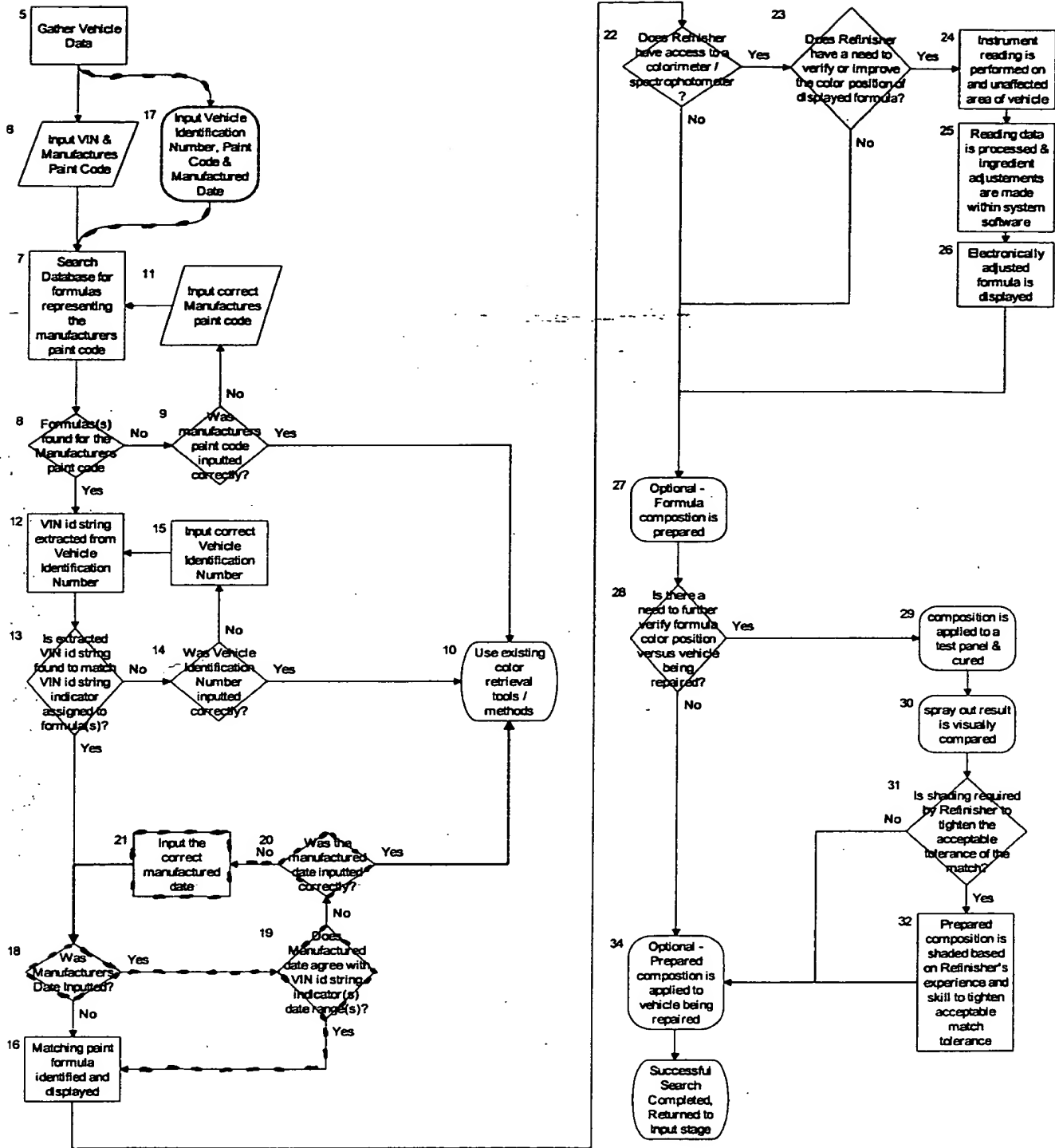


Fig. 3